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Mass Politics and the Democratic Challenge :

The prospects of Democratic Consolidation in Haiti

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More than three years after the US-led “Operation Restore Democracy ” reestablished the democratically elected government, the future of democracy in Haiti still remains ambiguous. The terrorist state of the Duvaliers and the predatory state of the Cedras-elite-FRAPH alliance are no longer wreaking havoc on the population and the treasury. Yet not much has changed ; institutions are still corrupt and inadequate, the economy has deteriorated and the police force offers no protection to the average citizen. The optimism of the pro-democracy movement has eroded and the population is becoming more and more frustrated with the political grandstanding of inexperienced politicians and the decline in living standards. While democratization may in fact be “ the solution to the problem of tyranny ” so far, it has not offered much hope for Haiti’s future (Huntington 1997:3). In a country where law and order, (whatever little of it existed before the democratization process) were maintained by the wielding of “coco macaques ”¹, an increased frustration and belligerency of the masses threatens to lead the country into anarchy and overrun the state.

¹. Creole for wooden stick.

The middle and lower classes have become disenchanted. Voter turnout is at its lowest from 90 % participation in 1990 to less than 30 % during the 1995 presidential elections and 20 % in 1997. The international community has practically stopped caring due to the inability of the government to get austerity measures required by the IMF through parliament. Crime has been increasing steadily and the newly organized and poorly equipped National police force is unable to uphold law and order and provide security for the average citizen. All of this while inexperienced politicians continue the get rich quick schemes of their predecessors, abusing state resources and funds. The presidency as an institution is under siege by parliament while the president is “fence seating” – trying not to undermine his mentor Aristide or raise the ire of the uncontrollable, unchallenged urban masses. Neighborhood vigilantism has become the primary line of defense against night invasions and murders by “Zinglin Dou”², a phenomena which never existed in Haitian society.

This essay seeks to evaluate Haitian democracy through the dominant democratic transition and consolidation debate by which all democracies are being assessed and the inherent assumptions being made about the state, civil society, electoral politics, institutional capacity and the popular sector. While it is true that Haitian democracy faces an uphill battle, it will be argued that democracy can still thrive and a serious attempt to meet people’s expectation that democracy should mean a better life for themselves and their children may be undertaken with the right institutional reforms, responsible and competent leadership, state enhancement, and the curbing of mob politics.

² Armed thieves, mainly former military and Haitian-American gang bangers deported by the US who invade peoples houses at night raping, killing and robbing them.

WHAT ARE THE ROOTS OF THE HAITIAN EXPERIENCE?

Some scholars³ are quick to fault more than thirty years of dictatorship and the culture of intolerance and authoritarianism it imposed on the population. Others⁴, have focused on the foundation of the Haitian state as the primary obstacle to nation-building and democracy. Whether Haiti's difficult transition can be explained by a lack of Western Culture or statelessness, is the site of much contentions. What is clear however is that democracy is far from being "the only game in town" and the fate of the Haitian state depends greatly on the ability to navigate in the treacherous waters of popular democracy, lack of democratic leadership and neo-liberal economic policies.

REQUISITE, PRE-REQUISITE AND ASSUMPTIONS.

There is consensus among many democratic transitologists and consolidationists that the existence of certain political and institutional conditions within a system is indicative of its democratic strength (Huntington 1996 ; Wiarda 1997 ; Revel 1983 ; and Dahl 1971). For these scholars, "the real possibility for change in government, electoral competition and a high level of collective action" coupled with a high dose of "constitutional opposition" formed the key pre-requisites for establishing democracy⁵. Together, Dahl's seven polyarchical institutional attributes, Wiarda, Huntington and Revel's emphasis on human rights and O'Donnell's four pragmatic propositions "constitute the lasting, universal, necessary conditions of any democracy"⁶.

³ Huntington (1984 ; 1996) is the main proponent for such a view.

⁴ Throuillot, (1995) and Ruffat (1991)

⁵ Flifisch - found in Tulchin and Varas (1991 : 13). Also see Lawson (1993)

⁶ Lyman, Diquattro and Burke (1994 : 132).

Dahl (1971), listed seven institutional conditions necessary for the establishment of contemporary democracy which have been accepted by the majority democracy scholars. They are : 1) elected officials ; 2) free and fair elections ; 3) inclusive suffrage ; 4) eligibility for all public office ; 5) enforced right to freedom of expression ; 6) free access to alternative sources of information for all ; 7) the right to form and join organizations.

Revel (1993) Wiarda (1979, 1988 & 1990) ; Huntington (1968, 1993 & 1997) ; O'Donnell (1997).

O'Donnell's recent article in the *Journal of Democracy* offered the following four new considerations to the democratic debate :

1) “ Elected officials should not be arbitrarily terminated before the end of their constitutionally mandated terms ”

2) “ Elected authorities should not be subject to constraints, vetoes, or exclusion from certain policy domain by other, non-elected actors, especially the armed forces ”

3) “ An uncontested national territory that clearly defines the voting population ”

4) “ The expectation that a fair electoral process and its surrounding freedoms will continue into an indefinite future ” (O'Donnell 1997 : 35-6).

A sizable middle class, economic growth, and high literacy rates are also viewed as fundamental complements in transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule. Democracy is seen as a middle and upper class affair and an attempt to wrestle power away from authoritarian rulers by conservative, “ trickle downist ” forces seeking greater access to economic resources and political power. Democratic opening is closely associated with political and human rights, wherein the middle class seeks full partnership, if not full control of the politics and economies of their countries.

Transitologists and Consolidationists make six main assumptions in framing the debate and establishing their list of pre-requisites.

1) A clear state identity or a nation exists that facilitates the transition from authoritarianism to democratic governance. To quote Stepan and Linz, “no state, no democracy” (Stepan and Linz 1996:14).

2) The Institutional frameworks capable of surviving the transition and instituting permanent and viable reforms to adapt to the new politico-social environment are already present.

3) Political leaders have no other option but to play by the democratic rules.

4) Demands for democracy entail a change in the political culture among the democratic participants (i.e. the populace and the ruling elites).

5) Institutions are capable of imposing constraints on all participants involved in the democratic project and to maintain their autonomy as institutions of rules and neutral arbiter in the democratic system.

6) Institutional capacity, and their ability to adapt to the new role required by the democratic process were thus seen as indispensable.

Transitologists and Consolidationists scholars assume that :

1) The military will be capable of functioning professionally as a protector of the country’s sovereignty and borders.

2) The police force will be a separate entity from the army and strong enough to maintain order and the rule of law within the nation. Furthermore, that its capacity to provide security to all citizens will be a “fait accompli”.

3) The judiciary will be able to provide justice for all and enjoy the confidence of all parties as well as remain autonomous from political actors and parties.

4) Parliament will have competent and relatively experienced leaders capable of constructive debates and prescriptions.

5) Financial institutions and ministries will have people concerned primarily with the good of the nation instead of their party affiliations and personal interests.

For them, a crucial break from the previous non-democratic system and the undermining and peripheralization of non-democratic norms and practices by the new democratic institutions was a necessity.

Associating democratic transitions to middle class demands, scholars such as Huntington (1968, 1996); Revel (1985) ; Dahl (1971) and O'Donnel & Schmitter (1986), consigned the popular sector to the voting booths. With no real power that the coercive arms of the state would not be able to control, for these scholars, it is simply inconceivable that the popular sector could become powerful enough to undermine the power of the ruling elites and question the legitimacy of the most important national institutions. A top down transition is seen as not only desirable, but highly sought after, and an “over-politicized” civil society and uncontrolled/unrestricted demands on the state are viewed as major threats to democracy⁷. Many of these scholars concur with the Huntingtonian assertion that “democratic regimes that last have seldom if ever, been instituted by mass popular action”⁸. The Haitian democratic experience ran counter to many of these assumptions. By the time the first democratic election took place, the only institution, although weakened, that still remained a force in the country was the military. Its ranks had by then been depleted by coups, infighting and voluntary or forced exilement of some of its best officers. The advent of democracy found the economy, school system, judiciary, church and all the major institutions of the state unable to function and displaying extreme inadequacy.

⁷ See Samuel P. Huntington (1968) and Sangmpam (1996)

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, (1984, 212.)

HAITIAN REALITY AND PARTICULARISM

The Economy

The economic conditions under which Haitian democracy evolved were disastrous at best. Agricultural export revenues decreased from \$ 113 million (US) in 1983/1984 to \$ 62.4 million in 1987/1988. Two hundred thousand homeless people lived in the capital, 15,000 people moved to the capital from the countryside, adding to an already over populated city. Between 1985 and 1990, 25,000 Haitians emigrated. Unemployment was 60 % ; however, 20 % of the 40 % listed as employed were actually under-employed (Victor, 1990, 36 - 8). Needless to say, there were insurmountable economic hardships and disparities that provided real challenges for Haitian democracy ab initio. By the end of the Duvaliers' dictatorship in 1986, 95 % of the rural population lived in abject poverty, three (3) out of four (4) children suffered from malnutrition, 75 - 80 % of the population was still illiterate. Annual revenue per capita was also as low as \$ 40.00 (US) for peasants and as high as 120,000 for the 1 % elite minority. Four thousand families out of a population of over 6 million had complete control over the economy and 44 % of the national revenue. 30 % of landowners owned 2/3 of the arable land and the educational system was barely capable of serving 15 % of the population (Castor 1990, 50 - 89)⁹. Shin's assertion that "at the individual level, increasing education and expanding income exposed the masses to the virtues of democratic civilization" seems highly contentious when we examine Haiti (Shin, 1994, 341). Yet, the call for democracy was overwhelming and unequivocal.

⁹ The figures cited in this paragraph reflect work done by Castor (1990) and Victor (1990), covering the period of 1985 to 1990.

The Judiciary

The judiciary was never independent during the dictatorship. Its decisions were usually bought or dictated by power brokers within the government. It never enjoyed the confidence of the population. Various efforts were made after the fall of Baby Doc by reformist elements in its ranks, but few of them were taken seriously. The institution mainly served the interest of the powerful and more often than not, it ignored violations of rights, arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, beatings, and seizures of lands. Had the institution been able to address these violations, it would have gained legitimacy in the eyes of the populace. Unfortunately the judiciary's pocketbook justice meant that for those who did not have the capacity to pay, justice was usually unavailable. The involvement of high court officials in political office would further damage the reputation of the judiciary and sudden interests in the manipulation and interpretations of laws and constitutional matter further damaged whatever confidence remained in the institutions¹⁰.

Recent attempts to reform the judiciary have been largely unsuccessful mainly because the same judges who served under Duvalier and the military dictatorship remain in office and individual connections and bribery are still dominant features of the system¹¹.

¹⁰ The court on many occasions interfered with negotiations for the return of Aristide, supposedly on constitutional grounds. The judiciary often sided with the military regime that ousted the elected government.

¹¹ Known torturers and murderers arrested after the return of Aristide have been released without any clear explanation. This has occurred both in Les Cayes and Port-au-Prince. Judges throughout Haiti are being arrested and/or there are complaints about their involvement in illegal activities. Capable judges are being let go due to their unwillingness to provide quick justice which very often would have amounted to sentencing or incarceration without trials to satisfy the populace.

The Military

The demise of Duvalierism left the country totally under the leadership of the military. Baby Doc had been permitted to form a military junta to replace him before his exile and this created an exceptional opportunity for the military to re-assert itself. The armed forces had played a subordinate role since the rise of Francois Duvalier in 1957 and the creation of a parallel armed force – the VSN¹², better known as the Tonton Macoutes to supplant the military¹³. In the early 1980s, conflicts developed between the military and the Macoutes. After more than two decades of subordination, the army cautiously attempted to re-assert its autonomy and protect its interests¹⁴. Military officers such as Abraham, Avril, Namphy and Regala sought an end to Macoutism to ensure the monopoly of state coercion. Already in the making for many years, the military/Macoutes conflict took center stage in the period from 1980 to 1990. Two months before Baby Doc's exile, the army refused to use their coercive power against the masses and protected the populace against attacks from the Macoutes. In the months that followed his departure, the military, disarmed most of the Macoutes and became the only organized armed force in Haiti. This act was misinterpreted by the population who praised the army and joyously carried its members on their shoulders throughout the capital.

¹² VSN stands for Volontaire de la Sécurité Nationale (Volunteer for National Security).

¹³ In 1957, after Francois Duvalier became president, he embarked on a systematic elimination of important members of the corps. In his first two years, he removed 6 colonels, 9 majors, 28 captains and 26 lieutenants. Also 12 colonels, 11 majors, 15 captains and 17 lieutenants were victims of assassinations and deadly attacks from Duvaliers' Tonton Macoutes. Another 19 officers were executed in June 1967. Most of these vacant spaces were filled by some of his own forces (Delince, 1979 : 222-4).

¹⁴ The army had regained some strength under Baby Doc because of the latter's unwillingness to maintain the balance created by his father. Baby Doc has inserted many of his schoolmates in the army and with the help of the US had organized a counterinsurgency battalion (the leopards) which became the state's most important, well trained and well equipped force. The Leopards lost a confrontation with the army after the fall of Baby Doc and were subsequently disbanded.

This “marriage” between the army and the populace soon changed as the army flexed its muscle, and carried out its agenda of law, order and Duvalierism. The population once again found itself under the gun by a military determined to remain in control of Haitian politics. However, having control of the state was not without its consequences. Factionalism stemming from ideological differences, political ambitions and personality conflicts between the officers persisted within the corps. Between 1986 and 1990, officers fought each other for control of the national treasury, drug trafficking and political power. Four military coups were orchestrated by low ranking semi-illiterate officers in the name and sometimes without the permission of their senior officers. Dissension within its ranks weakened the military and made it possible for the popular sector to challenge its control of the state and its legitimacy.

The Church and the Elites

The transitional period saw a rise in friction within all the ruling elite circles. The church and economic elites were no exception to this phenomena. Before 1986 conflicts emerged within the church, a longtime supporter of the Duvaliers, and its growing liberation theologians. Led by Aristide, liberation theology became a central force in the mass movement, creating dissent within the church hierarchy and excitement in the populace. Having been politically neutralized by Papa Doc in the late 1950s, the Haitian elites remained co-opted by the system until they too began to experience dissent within their ranks. The technocrats, mostly Noirist elites¹⁵ who have their roots in the Duvalier dynasty, have historically competed with the mulatto elite sector¹⁶. The technocrats, children of the Duvalierist

¹⁵ The Noirists are black power advocates that came into power in 1946. They were mainly from middle class background (See Nichol, 1979).

¹⁶ This is extremely important in Haitian history and dates back from the beginning of the revolution and accounted for the political instability in Haiti from 1791 to the rise of Papa Doc. The Black/Mulatto conflict subsided during the US occupation and became dominant in the period following the Marines departure from Haiti in 1934.

revolution, turned against Baby Doc opting for political liberalization. This shift in alliance was mostly the result of the frustrations created by the re-emergence of the Mulatto class and its monopolization of economic opportunities, the marriage of Baby Doc to Michelle Bennett¹⁷ and the loss of power experienced by the Noirists after the wedding. More politically powerful than the mulattos, the technocrats facilitated the fall of Duvalierism that had created them and whom they had, until then, tacitly supported. Duvalierism without Duvalier appeared to have been their motivation but internal dissent, ambitions and the assault of the popular sector that would no longer tolerate the vestiges of a system that oppressed them for close to thirty years, would undermine their coherence and political goals.

Democratic Transition :
The power vacuum of the 1986 - 1990 period

This “chin manje chin¹⁸,” crisis within the ruling elites and the army’s hesitancy in dealing with the urban sector, diverted pressure from the masses. Being the only coercive apparatus, the army became more and more alarmed as Haitians took justice into their own hands. Lawlessness, looting, mob violence in the name of justice and banditry became commonplace. The activities of the urban masses in the post-dictatorship period created an environment of fear, and anarchy (Chamberlain 1995 - NACLA). These activities challenged the military’s role as a guarantor of order, security and peace. They also frightened the elites who not only feared for their lives, but knew that at any time, their businesses and private properties could fall prey to the masses. Various attempts by the military to restrain the masses

Papa Doc (Francois Duvalier) used the Tonton Macoutes to destroy Mulatto’s political power and is still held in High regards by many within the middle class for doing so. See Nichols(1979).

¹⁷ The Bennetts were Mulattos and Baby Doc’s marriage into the mulatto class and their subsequent prominence in the political sphere angered most of the Noirists/black elites in the country. As a parallel, Aristide’s Marriage to a mulatto has rendered him somewhat less popular in the lower and middle class sector.

¹⁸ “Dog eats dog”

resulted in bloodshed and further radicalization of the popular sector. Finally, unable to control the popular sector, to re-assert itself on the political landscape, and feeling pressure from the international community, the military retreated. The army was weakened by the depletion of qualified officers in its ranks after four coups and countless murders. Its retreat left the society completely at the mercy of the increasingly unruly urban masses.

With the military weakened by infighting, the church divided, the Macoutes disbanded, and institutions such as the judiciary and parliament having never enjoyed the confidence of the Haitian populace, the terrain was set for either anarchy or a new center of power. The mass movement emboldened by the ouster of Duvalier, conflicts within the ruling elites and the sudden interest of the international community attempted to fill the vacuum.

Mass Politics and the Failure of Leadership

With 90 % of the voters registered in an internationally supervised election, Aristide won 67 % of the vote in December 1990, leaving his most important contender with 14 %. Politically inexperienced, unaccustomed to negotiating agreements, literally believing in the power and wisdom of the urban masses and besieged by a parliament that constitutionally was more powerful than the executive branch, Aristide allowed the popular sector to play a direct role in national politics. The shift from institutional control and accountability to a loose form of semi-anarchical mass politics was already apparent in the first two months following his inauguration. Unable to get his prime minister ratified, Aristide called on the masses who threatened to burn down parliament and use violence against elected officials, forcing them to ratify the prime minister out of fear for their lives and properties. Aristide's politics depended on the threat of violence by the populace. No institutions or individuals dared to disagree with him. Having his supporters as leverage against established institutions, Aristide refused to even accept the advice and

mandate of the coalition that brought him to power¹⁹. The unwillingness of the elected government to reign in its supporters, its rejection and disregard for traditional politicians, and his attack on the military forced a re-alignment of all the ruling elites sectors. The first seven months of Aristide's government witnessed unparalleled attacks on the traditional institutions²⁰ as well as his democratic allies. For example :

1) The day of his inauguration, Aristide retired six of the seven military generals publicly humiliating an already weak army.

2) He named a cabinet composed of personal friends, rejecting important political figures even in his own party.

3) He failed to react when his supporters burned down an anti-government union headquarters and the offices of his former ally, FNCD.

4) He created two independent presidential guards a la Papa Doc, in an attempt to distance the military and remove the possibility of a coup.

Prior to his overthrow, Aristide had made enemies of all the major institutions in the country²¹ including some newly established ones that supported him during his election. Every major institution resented his political tactlessness and his attempt to undermine their legitimacy. The army was particularly frustrated with Aristide for undermining their prestige and power and humiliating their officer

¹⁹ The coalition that brought Aristide to office consisted of five parties : KONAKOM - National Congress of the Democratic Movement ; PNDPH - National Popular Democratic Haitian Party ; OP-17 - Popular Organization of September 17 ; KID - Confederation Democratic Unity ; and FNCD - National Front for Change and Democracy. (see Ives, Kim "The Lavalas Alliance Propels Aristide to Power " in NACLA 1995.)

²⁰ See Jean-Francois " Démocratie et Société en Haiti : Droits Humain en Haiti MPP au cœur de la Repression ", *Rencontre* #5 1993:8-10 for details on Aristide's attacks on the traditional institutions. J. P. Slavin in NACLA 1995 *Haiti: Dangerous Crossroads*. Also give some insights on the subject.

²¹ Chamberlain, Greg, " Haiti's 'Second Independence'" NACLA 1995).

corps²² ; the Catholic church, because he accused its bishop of being enemy of the people and allowed the masses to attack its clergy and churches²³ ; the parliament, because of Aristide's use of the urban masses to intimidate them and undercut their authority. The political parties and experienced politicians were also frustrated with Aristide because he had consistently insulted them and sent his supporters to harass and threaten them. The economic elites were frustrated because Aristide espoused redistributive policies that were against their economic interests and allowed and even encouraged the masses to burn their properties and businesses while threatening them with "pere lebrun",²⁴. Aristide had miscalculated the power of the polls from the start. He distanced himself from every other possible source of support, and relied on the masses to defend and protect him. Organized by the military and external forces²⁵, supported by the church hierarchy and financed by the economic elites, the coup came as no surprise. The post coup period saw an army determined to re-assert itself by any means necessary and send the police packing once and for all.

In trying to give voice to a population in a system corrupted by more than 50 years of dictatorship, Aristide unleashed a monster that could not be controlled²⁶. A stable democratic government is often

²² In an interview with Michel François, after the coup, he made it clear that the army considered Aristide a threat and that the retirement of its high command on inauguration day was seen as an international humiliation.

²³ The bishop of Haiti, Monsignor François Wolf Ligonde openly accused Aristide of being a danger for Haiti. Also, urban masses had attacked the papal representative in Haiti, taking all his clothes off and parading him in the streets. This barbaric act was a public humiliation for the catholic church.

²⁴ "Pere Lebrun" is the name given to the practice of burning people alive with a tire full of gasoline placed around their neck. There is much debate on whether Aristide advocated mob violence, but no one disagrees that his rhetoric incited the urban poor to violence and that he never explicitly condemned the violence and live burnings orchestrated by his supporters.

²⁵ It was reported by the *New York Times* that General Raoul Cedras was on CIA payroll. It was also reported that terror groups were financed by CIA operators to destabilize the popular democratic sectors.

²⁶ It is clear that Aristide was well intentioned toward the majority of the population which had been for so long neglected. The poverty he witnessed while working along side them energized him to speak about social justice. Aristide's

characterized as one that is disciplined, united, capable of addressing its own internal problems and one that respects the electoral system and keeps extremists and radicals away from the decision making process and the center of power²⁷. Aristide's unwillingness to control his supporters, his refusal to work with and support the existing institutions, his strong arm tactics in the face of parliamentary oppositions, and his totalitarian tendencies were important weaknesses and determinant factors in the overthrow of the first democratically elected government.

The politics of the populace : Choosing between a strong state and anarchy after the coup

The post-coup period of 1991 through the fall of 1994 saw widespread repression by the military aided by FRAPH²⁸, a newly organized paramilitary group. Many escaped for their lives on rickety boats to be mistreated and repatriated by foreign governments²⁹. However, in spite of the oppressive measures against it, the popular sector's resolve for a democratic government remained unchanged. Its resolve was partly encouraged by the change in government in the United States from Bush to Clinton, the newly acquired political savviness of Aristide's circle on the international scene, and the determination of Haitians living abroad, especially in the US, to put an

concerns for and closeness to the poor cannot be ignored in assessing his policies. However, his reliance on them as a political force is alarming since Aristide has anti-institutional tendencies and prefers dictations rather than negotiations.

²⁷ Blais, Andre and Dion, Stephane. Democracy and Consolidation. - found in Ethier, Diane(1990)

²⁸ It would become common knowledge that FRAPH was financed by the CIA and that his leader Emmanuel Toto Constant was paid monthly for his services. (*Haiti Insight*, vol. 6, N° 6, Aug/Sep 1996.)

²⁹ Those same governments did not recognize the de facto regime in Haiti and were critical of the campaign of terror being perpetuated by the military. Ironically, they had no qualm about sending Haitians back under the control of the very government who had forced them to flee and whom they criticized for killing and terrorizing them.

end to military rule. The popular sector maintained its hope and vowed to resist all tactics by the deadly military/FRAPH/elite alliance.

Finally, with an embargo imposed by the international community, pressure from the “friends of Haiti” (France, Canada, United States, Argentina and Venezuela) and the threat of frontal assault, the military bowed to a “soft landing” of US troops³⁰. Tamed and temporarily restrained by his commitment to the international community to abide by democratic norms, Aristide returned to the presidency on October 15, 1994. Soon thereafter, the temporary alliance between Aristide and the international community, especially the Clinton/Gore administration would be strained by the military question. While the Clinton administration sought to re-structure the army and “professionalize” it, Aristide wanted its elimination, modeled after Costa Rica³¹. The US administration’s goal to professionalize the army was ironically undermined by the presence of foreign (mainly American) forces³² on Haitian soil. One of the first acts of the peace keeping force was to seize and destroy the heavy weaponry of the Haitian armed forces - placing them in a subordinate and ineffective role. Aristide capitalized on this historic vulnerability retiring the remaining military high command who did not go into voluntary exile and reduced the force from 7,000 to 1,500. The elimination of the military terminated the only mechanism of law and order leaving the masses as the most powerful and coercive sector in

³⁰ Although some sanctions were imposed, they were unsuccessful because the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti was used to transport goods into the country. The sanctions were in fact very lucrative for the elites and the military officers because they controlled the price, transportation and quantity of merchandise in the country. It was mainly the average citizen who suffered and had no access to food, running water and electricity.

³¹ The former president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias visited Aristide following his return in Haiti to counsel him on the military question.

³² The UN forces were American dominated and Clinton hope of protecting the army was undermined by the action of his own military, and the mandate to disarm anti-democratic forces. The American forces destroyed all the heavy weaponry of the army but left armed groups operating in the main cities under the leadership of known thugs. The military was rendered useless since its coercive capacity and its leaders were exiled or removed from power by the American forces.

the country. Aristide would unscrupulously use them to pressure his opponents as well as undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Preval/Smart government³³.

The demise of the military had also delegitimized most of the political parties who had in some fashion participated in post-coup governments or not spoken against the coup³⁴. A schism also developed between those who had stayed in Haiti to oppose military rule and those who had fled into exile. This schism also, for the first time, brought to light the two main tendencies within Lavalas. According to senior members of the OPL, Aristide's anti-institutionalism had to be kept in check for democracy to survive and this attempt to balance his power was met with resistance from Aristide and his supporters. Unable to make his own choice to form his cabinet without the consent of his party, pressured to conform to party politics and respect those who had remained in the country, and frustrated by the unwillingness of a major sector of his party to support the recuperation of the three years spent in exile, Aristide sought to distance himself from his own party³⁵.

It did not take long for factionalism to develop within OPL. A solution was sought by choosing Rene Preval as candidate for the presidency. Aware of the relationship between Aristide and Preval, OPL selected the latter to ensure the continuity and implementation of Aristide's policies and most importantly, his blessing. This strategy proved unsuccessful as Aristide refused to support his close associate

³³ After the shooting of his cousin in the summer of 1996, Aristide sent the populace into the street to search cars for weapons. This created much tension in the country.

³⁴ The involvement of some parties in the military government has helped to discredit them in the eyes of the population and will hinder their electoral bid. Parties such as PREN led by Alix Cineas, ANDP by Marc Basin, UNFD by Honorat and PANPRA by Serge Gilles have discredited themselves through their participation in the military regime. It may take a long time for any of their leaders to become viable candidates in important elections.

³⁵ See Gros, Jean-Germain "Haiti's Flagging Transition", *Journal of Democracy*, 8,4 (1997) 94-109.

and former prime minister until two days before the elections³⁶. As a result, voter turnout was at its lowest ever and coalition politics in parliament became impossible as member allegiances fluctuated sometimes hourly³⁷.

Out of 30 % voter turnout, Preval won by 89 %³⁸. The Preval government which was weak, enjoyed neither the confidence of OPL nor the support of Aristide saddled with a constitution that sapped the presidency of all powers (Gros 1997 : 97-109), became mired in gridlock. Two months after his inauguration, the government faced strong criticism from all sides due to its implementation of an economic program that his predecessor had worked out in the Paris Conference in July 1994. With no funds in state coffers, Preval could neither use state patronage to attain parliamentary and mass support or institute programs to increase his popularity. He was forced to retreat and his capitulation caused most of the international donors to withhold their funds³⁹.

It was apparent to most observers that OPL would split and it was no surprise when Aristide, hoping to undermine the influence and power of OPL, finally formed his own party - Fanmi Lavalas, ending one of the most important political alliances in Haitian democratic history. Members of OPL boasted that the party could not be undermined because while Aristide was enjoying his stay in New York, they were engaged with the populace and establishing a firm

³⁶ This interestingly was the same prime minister against whom Aristide had sent the masses to intimidate parliament in 1991 !

³⁷ I attended a few political meetings in 1995 and 1996 in various parts of the country, where voters displayed their frustrations and confusion because they could no longer determine which politicians they could trust. Some of these meetings were organized by Non-Governmental Organizations and NDI (National Institute for Democracy), as well as Organization Politique Lavalas (now Organization du Peuple en Lutttes).

³⁹ The Haitian government and international lending institutions have worked out an arrangement to ensure that funds will be disbursed to the government regardless of the actions of parliament. This arrangement would help the Preval government gain some legitimacy by instituting some programs to help the popular sector.

base within the population. As many observers pointed out, by breaking with OPL, Aristide lost his monopoly on the population. This split could potentially offer the only vehicle for political contestation. However, with Aristide's demagoguery, his messianic tendency and his manipulation of the masses, Haiti may miss the democratic boat⁴⁰.

The challenge of democratic leadership : using the urban masses as political actors ?

Historically, the Haitian masses have been used by strong men and politicians as a source of power in Haiti and the state has always been at their mercy. In the post-independence period until the US occupation of 1915, regional strong men manipulated the illiterate peasantry and organized them into armed bands to usurp power and create instability in Haiti. From 1804 to 1915, 15 out of 19 heads of state were either murdered or overthrown by regional uprisings (Sangmpam , 1995)⁴¹. The US occupation eliminated the capacity of regional forces to make frontal assaults on the state and organized a military capable of keeping the rural population in check. Its centralization policies brought the rural population to the city and created another phenomena. The period following the Marines forceful departure from Haiti was marked by the rise of urban politicians who manipulated popular dissent to incite urban uprisings and violence in the capital⁴². Duvalier had put an end to this phenomena by initially espousing its cause and later through terror tactics and by using some of the same urban elements to create his own military force – the VSN. Under the Duvaliers, the illiterate urban population was kept in check

⁴⁰ In various political meetings throughout the country, it was apparent that people were beginning to question Aristide's motive. However, the factions that usually followed him offered fanatical support and were willing to resort to violence to achieve their goals. For them, Aristide could do no wrong and his speeches or sermons as they are referred to were often taken literally.

⁴¹ See Sangmpam, S. N., " The Overpoliticized State and International Politics ". Third World Quarterly- Journal of Emerging Areas Vol. 16, n° 4, Dec. 1995 p. 619-641.

⁴² Daniel, Fignole who preceded Francois Duvalier, was known for such tactics.

through clientelist networks and repression. The 1980's was the first time in more than three decades that the masses were able to flex their muscles against a less than cohesive ruling elite.

Culturally homogeneous, with an illiteracy rate of more than 70 %, sharing political experiences and grudges against a state that has for decades neglected and terrorized them, the urban masses were inclined to follow anyone who took up their cause. Aristide with his anti-Duvalierist, anti-Macoutes, anti-US and pro-redistribution/populist rhetoric was the perfect candidate. His first seven months in office reflected his pledge to fight for the masses but they also showed his uncanny tendency to mobilize them to do his bindings instead of relying on democratic method and institutional channels. His years in exile produced a more sophisticated politician but did not eliminate his tendencies to attack the state institutions and manipulate the populace. A skillful orator, aware of linguistic idiosyncrasies, Aristide no longer overtly incites the masses but still maintains a hold on the most radical and poorest sector that makes his commitment to democratic governance and faith in democratic institutions questionable but necessary for the future of Haitian democracy⁴³.

Until the split of OPL, the monopolization of the political space offered a bleak future for Haiti⁴⁴. Overpoliticization, the absence of strong democratic institutions and the weakness of the new police force

⁴³ In this regard, I concur with Gros, have that leadership is crucial for democracy to survive in Haiti : various groups associated with his party has been involved in anti-democratic activities. Armed men from these groups have attacked police stations and killed officers of the law. They have also been involved in activities such as Kidnappings and intimidation campaigns. Aristide's silence in the face of these actions reflects a particular pattern. (See Gros 1997 and *Haiti Info*'s January, April and March 1998 issues).

⁴⁴ Even with a 30 % voter turnout, Preval obtained 89 % of the vote. In the preceding parliamentary elections Lavalas, also won 80 % of the seats and most of them with a vote ratio of 10/1. This is partly because most of the opposition parties were discredited for their involvement and miscalculations during the three years after the coup. (see *LIBETE* - a Haitian news paper written in Creole.) The IRI (International Republican Institute also noted that " the massive abstention and lopsided vote raised deeply disturbing questions concerning the future of democratic institutions, processes, and culture in Haiti " (IRI - Haiti - Election Observation Report - Dec. 17, 1995).

made leadership one of the primary factors for the future of Haitian democracy. However the presence of two strong parties, has the potential to offer a broader choice to the population and may eliminate the trend toward vote concentration that is so characteristic of emerging democracies where ethnic politics does not play a central role⁴⁵. Both parties have a strong constituent base and legitimacy, which sets the stage for real political contestation to take place. However, everything depends on belief in the usefulness of democracy, Aristide's willingness to play by the rules, and a change from the tendency of zero sum politics to political negotiations and coalitions to facilitate governance. Although the strength of the two parties may create the space for negotiation, democratic leadership remains indispensable for such negotiations to occur. As Aristide's monopoly on the population eclipses, his messianic tendency and his inciting oratory may become less and less tenable⁴⁶.

Nevertheless, the consolidation of Haitian democracy still depends heavily on the popular sector more so than it does on the weak institutions that currently exist. As Lipset correctly argues ; "new democracies must be institutionalized, consolidated, and become legitimate. They face many problems, among which are creating a growing and more equalitarian economy; reducing the tensions with, and perhaps replacing, the old civil and military elites " (Lipset, 1993, 7). Neo-liberal economic policies such as privatization of state-owned

⁴⁵ The phenomena of voter monopoly is not unique to Haiti. Many democracies such as Spain, Mexico until recently, Dominican Republic, to name a few, experienced one-party "democracies". New democracies in Eastern Central Europe also experience this phenomena. In a paper presented at the New England Political Science Association I argued that Voter concentration may provide legitimacy, stability, continuity and a chance to strengthen democratic institutions during the transitional period. I still think that it is something to consider as Spain and Mexico experienced at least 10 years of one-party rule prior to becoming a polyarchy. International actors should recognize this as an important aspect of democratic transitions and not try to create multi-party systems prematurely. Given due time, multi-party systems are likely to develop out of the contradictions and shortcomings of the dominant party.

⁴⁶ This is reflective of the songs during the 1998 carnival which criticized Aristide and other political leader. Also popular organizations who have historically supported him are distancing themselves from him and asking the parties to negotiate an end to the crisis (HaitiInfo, March 14, 1998)

industries and parastatal organizations and the trimming down of the state workforce coupled with the rising prices of food and basic products have created widespread discontent and may force the population into the streets. The reaction to economic hardship associated with democratization threatens the stability of the democratic process. In this context, neo-liberal policies seem to be an anathema to democratic continuity. The further deterioration of the social climate and the standard of living as a result of these policies and the absence of a competent police force capable of controlling a population known for its excesses has made political legitimacy and good leadership indispensable to democratic consolidation⁴⁷. “Political stability in a democratic system relies heavily on legitimacy and explicit or implicit support from the citizenry” (Lipset, 1993, 7). Economic hardship and the neo-liberal policies associated with the US sponsored democratic model appear to be exacerbating the institutional, leadership and legitimacy problems of the vacillating Haitian democratic system.

The ability of a new democratic government to use the coercive arm of the state diminishes, they seem plagued by “growing crises of governability”. Overpoliticization, frustrations about high inflation, increased demands on the state by the popular and elite sectors for security, economic efficiency and better service, make Haitian democracy extremely fragile. The observation that “the combination of democracy, low income economy, substantial inequities and state intervention tends to politicize all forms of societal cleavages - old versus new, social and economic” appears to be partially applicable to Haiti (Kohli, 1993, 677). The “accumulation of distributive claims” on the state and its ability to address those claims has been a source of destabilization and delegitimacy. According to Kohli, “given the scarcity in a poor economy, the competitive energies of the many

⁴⁷ The police force has become the target of former military and paramilitary thugs as well as bandits. From January to mid-June of 1995, eight (8) police officers were murdered. Their inability to protect themselves have made the population less and less confident in the police’s ability to protect them. My interviews with neighborhood watch groups suggest that lack of confidence in the police has forced them to take matters into their own hands. (see HaitiInsight’s of Aug/Sep 1996 for more details.)

individuals and groups seeking economic improvements tend to get focused on the state”. Thus, he adds, “competition over state resources often results in intense conflicts, contributing to the problems of democratic consolidation” stability and governance (Kohli, 1993, 677). It is an increasingly widely held view that this new wave of democratization comes with expectations that are difficult to satisfy without sustained economic growth. What is more, scholars overwhelmingly agree that in these new democracies, economic policies must be adjusted to “fit democratic mandates” and the expectations of the populace. Linz and Stepan (1997) however, have mistakenly argued that economic problems may not be a catalyst for attacks on the state⁴⁸. These authors assert that new democracies face undue expectations and that the quality of democracy and the “quality of society must be disassociated”. For these two scholars, “no democracy can assure the presence of reputable bankers, entrepreneurs with initiative, physicians devoted to their patients, competent professors, creative scholars and artists or even honest judges” (Linz and Stepan, 1997, 30). While they may be correct that new democracies have many difficulties to overcome, they may have ignored the fact that in many places democracy was fought for on the belief that it would ameliorate the living conditions of the citizenry. If democracy cannot assure the reliability of the national professionals, it must at least create the conditions, institutional framework and environment necessary to make them accountable.

We would have to concur with Gros that “the challenge for Haiti is to find a sustainable democratic alternative” (Gros, 1997, 106). What constitute this sustainable democratic alternative ? Clearly, the challenge to democratic rule in Haiti rests not on the absence or presence of “western culture and values” as some scholars suggest. It is rather the conditions under which the transition took place, the imposition of external forces and the elusive commitment of political leaders.

⁴⁸ These authors have indicated ethnic politics are more prone to destabilize, make the state a target, than economic hardships. This oversight is mainly due to the fact that they have ignored the correlation between economic decline and the rise in ethnic conflicts. There have been many studies about the US that validate this correlation.

The continued reliance of the state on the international security forces for protection against paramilitary groups and the urban masses is indicative of its apparent weakness. If democracy cannot be protected nationally and by the average Haitian citizen, then we should not be too optimistic about its survival. The challenge is to provide enough incentives to make democracy not only indispensable but desirable for the elites and populace alike. This cannot be achieved with an incapacitated state that is unable to maintain law and order, strengthen its institutions and revitalize its economy.



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Résumé

Cet essai cherche à analyser la démocratie haïtienne à travers le débat dominant sur la transition et la consolidation à partir duquel toutes les démocraties sont évaluées et des hypothèses qui en découlent concernant l'Etat, la société civile, la politique électorale, la capacité des institutions et le secteur populaire. Bien que la démocratie haïtienne livre une difficile bataille, on argumentera qu'elle peut encore s'épanouir. Une tentative sérieuse pour répondre aux attentes du peuple selon lesquelles une démocratie devrait signifier une vie meilleure pour tout le monde pourrait être effective avec des réformes institutionnelles appropriées, un leadership responsable et compétent, la rationalisation de l'Etat et la limitation de la politique de masse.

Mots-clés

Démocratisation - Eglise - Haiti -
Leadership politique - Pouvoir militaire.

Abstract

This essay seeks to evaluate Haitian democracy through the dominant democratic transition and consolidation debate by which all democracies are being assessed and the inherent assumptions being made about the state, civil society, electoral politics, institutional capacity and the popular sector. While it is true that Haitian democracy faces an uphill battle, it will be argued that democracy can still thrive. A serious attempt to meet people's expectations that a democracy should mean a better life for everyone could be effective with the right institutional reforms, responsible and competent leadership, the rationalization of the state, and the curtailment of mob politics.

Keys-words

Church - Democratization - Haiti
- Military - Political leadership.